



Representative
Ruth Kagi

2003 *Session Report*

Keeping in Touch

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Committees:

- Children & Family Services
(Chair)
- Appropriations
- Criminal Justice &
Corrections

Dear neighbors,

Often during this long session, I have been struck with the honor and privilege of serving as your representative. It's a tremendous challenge to set priorities in this complex and confusing time – when initiatives require more spending on education and health care, but revenues fall below levels needed to even maintain existing services.

I know many people are disappointed with the state budget, and so am I. But I voted for the final budget because I believe it is the fairest and most balanced we could achieve this year given the \$2.6 billion deficit and our inability to get agreement with the Senate on raising new revenues.

I'd like to take this chance to tell you what happened in the Legislature this session, because the decisions made on the budget, transportation and education will affect individuals and families in our community for years to come.

Inside this newsletter, you'll find out how the Legislature acted on:

- ◆ Funding for education
- ◆ Balancing the budget
- ◆ Fircrest
- ◆ Unclogging traffic gridlock, and
- ◆ Protecting children and services for seniors

I'm interested in hearing your thoughts and opinions. Looking ahead, what goals should we try to meet? What do we want our neighborhoods and state to look like ten years from now? How can we get there?

If you have any comments, questions or thoughts, feel free to contact me or my legislative aide, Sonja Jacobsen, in our district office. The phone number is 206-368-4691.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve the people of the 32nd District. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Rep. Ruth Kagi

The budget

This session, the Legislature faced a dilemma: a \$2.6 billion hole in the budget and three initiatives mandating more spending on schools and health care. We clearly needed new revenues to fund these increases in expenditures.



Over the past two decades, whenever the legislature has faced a big deficit, the budget has been balanced with both budget cuts and revenue increases. Unfortunately, a balanced approach was not taken this year. Early in the session, Gov. Gary Locke and the Senate Republicans solidified behind a no-new-taxes budget. I supported a House budget proposal that increased sin taxes and other revenue in order to fund the education initiatives and health care.

While our position did not win the day, we did negotiate a much better budget than those proposed by the governor and the Senate.

Education Funding

Despite the painful cuts to other areas of the budget, we did protect public schools from the worst of the budget axe. Washington is a real contrast to Oregon, which solved its budget crisis by cutting funding to K-12 and shortening the school year. While we did not fund needed increases to carry out Initiatives 732 and 728, and some individual programs were cut, overall funding for public schools was increased by 2%.

I agree with putting education first, as does our state constitution, which states that education is the paramount duty of the state.

Our final budget gives all beginning teachers a raise, with the goal being each teacher starting above \$30,000 a year, and increases state funding for health benefits. It also provides funding for smaller class sizes, but not at the level mandated by Initiative 728.

I will continue to fight for better school funding and teacher pay, as our economy now depends upon brainpower, not horsepower. Education is the best possible investment we can make toward common prosperity, but we must find new ways of funding a top-quality education for every child.

Protecting children

Budget cuts — In the governor's budget, programs to protect children faced \$68 million in cuts. That included programs to prevent child abuse, get homeless kids off the street and aid foster children.

We were able to restore over \$65 million in funding for these most vulnerable children.



Foster children

As chair of the Children and Family Services Committee, I am proud to say that we passed a significant reform to help foster children.



One of the biggest problems facing foster kids is a lack of stability, not only in how many homes they're moved around to but how many times they're forced to switch schools. We passed a bill I sponsored making it state policy to keep foster children in their own schools and help them achieve educational success.

Dependency court

Decisions shouldn't be made in secret. That's a fundamental principle underlying our democracy, and it's the reason I supported this reform to make court decisions about a child's future – who'll be their parent or guardian – open to the public instead of secret.

32nd Legislative District



News for seniors

Reducing the cost of prescription drugs

Too many seniors are forced to choose between paying the grocery bills and buying the medicines they need to stay healthy and alive. This year, the Legislature passed a plan to lower the cost of prescription medicine, especially for low-income seniors.

Our plan allows for bulk buying of drugs to save money, adopts a preferred drug list based on the best medical evidence available, and educates consumers and providers about the list, how it was developed, and how it works.

Home-care workers

Many seniors depend upon long-term care. This session, I fought hard for better pay and benefits for the home-care workers who help so many seniors to stay in their own homes. The final budget includes a \$.75/hour raise for home-care workers.

Nursing homes

In another effort to increase our support for long-term care services, the Legislature approved a bipartisan plan to boost revenues for nursing home care. The added funds will support a 3% increase in payment rates to help maintain the quality of nursing home care in the state.

Unclogging traffic

To fix gridlock on I-5, we had to unclog political gridlock in Olympia.

I'm happy to report that we passed a \$4.2 billion plan to make our highways safer and less crowded; to invest in vanpools, trains and buses; and to keep our ferry system alive. The

transportation budget also includes \$10 million to help fund needed improvements in the Aurora corridor through Shoreline. We increased the gas tax by 5 cents, which is the first increase since 1991.



Construction projects

We passed an innovative capital budget that puts an historic amount of money into affordable housing for seniors, the disabled and the working poor.

The construction budget also makes heavy investments in our public schools, colleges and universities. For decades, the state has paid for less and less of the cost to build schools, with local taxpayers paying more. This budget reverses that trend. It means real savings for local property taxpayers when new schools are built or remodeled.

Local projects in the construction budget include:

- ◆ \$1.6 million for the Shoreline Interurban Trail Crossing
- ◆ \$300,000 for the Woodway Wildlife Reserve
- ◆ \$500,000 for the Edmonds Center for the Arts.

Fircrest

Over the past decade, the population of developmentally disabled in our state institutions (called Residential Rehabilitation Centers or RHCs) has dropped from 4,000 to about 1,000 as we moved toward community-based services. Given the cost of operating large, underutilized institutions and the enormous deficits that we face, it's clear we need to consolidate.

Early in the session, the Senate passed a bill to close Fircrest and sell the land. I agree with the need to consolidate, but not with the closure of Fircrest. I sponsored a substitute bill in the House to close the Rainier School in Buckley, which is far from population centers and needs major capital investment. That bill never came to a vote.

Instead, the state budget requires that Fircrest be downsized, but not closed. The budget also includes funding to study alternative uses of underutilized RHC properties. The House adamantly opposes selling the Fircrest land, and insisted on language in the budget precluding consideration of the sale option. The income will support community services for developmentally disabled individuals.

Grab bag

Protecting you against fraud –



There's been a recent rash of insurance fraud in Washington state and the nation. Insurance companies who aren't authorized to do business – or don't have enough money to pay claims – are lying to consumers about those facts and selling policies, then refusing to pay or vanishing entirely.

We passed an important reform to fight insurance fraud. We gave the insurance commissioner the tools needed to track down these con artists and prevent them from finding more victims here in Washington.

No more telemarketing calls

The national Do Not Call list is now open. If you don't want to receive telemarketing calls, sign up your telephone numbers by visiting www.donotcall.gov or calling 1-888-382-1222.

Dial 211 for community services –

Starting on Feb. 11 of next year – 2-11-04 – you can dial 211 in King County and get information about community services. This is an important reform to help individuals and families find the services they need.

Lead and mercury –

I sponsored a bill to ban lead shot, as lead is a poison and toxin that leads to brain damage or death. Other shot is just as effective for hunters — and doesn't hurt the environment or our health. I also supported a bill to tackle the problem of mercury; a single tablespoon of mercury can contaminate an entire lake. The mercury reform became law. Unfortunately, the lead shot bill did not. Next session, I'll keep pushing reforms to protect our clean air and water.

